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# newark black film festival

Celebrating Four Decades of Excellence  
in African American Cinema

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enduring and comprehensive program of its kind. The Festival presents programs that reflect a diversity of viewpoints, from documentaries to experimental or avant-garde, from major narrative pieces to short animation, bringing the work of both prominent and lesser-known filmmakers to a wide audience. Since 1974, over 800 films have been screened at the Festival to a total audience of 180,000. Such an extraordinary patronage speaks well of the Greater Newark community, which in many ways constitutes a culturally sophisticated terrain and a constellation of deeply engaged citizens.

## A 40-Year Legacy

Forty years ago, films exploring the black experience were relegated to the margins of the American cinema, underfunded, underappreciated and largely unseen by the general public. To address this void, an annual film festival highlighting the work of African American and African diasporic producers, filmmakers, directors and actors was established in Philadelphia, the precursor of what we now call the Newark Black Film Festival (NBFF).

Today, the Newark Black Film Festival is the longest-running and among the most prestigious black film festivals in the United States, widely acknowledged as the most

Screenings are followed by question-and-answer sessions with special guests and commentators, adding context and background. Through the years, the Festival has attracted the participation of such stellar figures as Amiri Baraka, Donald Bogle, Pearl Bowser, Charles Burnett, Kathleen Collins, Fatoumata Coulibaly, Julie Dash, Ernest Dickerson, Ava DuVernay, Mayor Kenneth Gibson, Danny Glover, William Greaves, Sam Greenlee, Thomas C. Guy Jr., Isaac Hayes, Warrington and Reginald Hudlin, James Earl Jones, Spike Lee, Abbey Lincoln, Shola Lynch, Joe Morton, Gil Noble, Euzan Palcy, Gordon Parks, Brock Peters, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Paul Robeson Jr., Usman Sharif, Bobby Shepard, Marta Moreno Vega, Richard Wesley, and James Van Der Zee.

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**"For over 40 years, the Festival and its creators have provided a crucial forum for discussion and debate, for examination and experimentation, for reflection and progression, and in doing so have helped to nurture cultural democracy on both sides of the camera."**

Clement Alexander Price, Ph.D.

*Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor of History, Rutgers University  
NBFF Founding Member*



**"I tell filmmakers, if you want to put your film to a litmus test for authenticity, screen it in Newark."**

Warrington Hudlin  
President, Black Filmmaker Foundation  
NBFF Filmmaker Alumnus

## History in the Making

The Newark Black Film Festival originated in 1974 as part of a touring black film festival conceived and organized by filmmaker Oliver Franklin, a fellow at the Annenberg Center for Communication, Art and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. Newark luminary Gustav Henningburg learned about the festival and proposed it to Newark Museum director Samuel C. Miller and director of programs, Marjorie W. Fredericks, to undertake as a Newark-based project. They agreed. Three years later, a volunteer Festival Selection Committee was formed. Four of the founding members are still involved with the Festival.

NBFF founding members included representatives from leading institutions, organizations and resources in the community: James Brown, Newark Public Library; Gloria Hopkins Buck, Newark Public Schools; Clement Alexander Price, Rutgers University; Alfred D. Price, New Jersey Institute of Technology; Patricia Faison and Mary Sue Sweeney, Newark Museum.

Films were screened at New Jersey Institute of Technology on six successive Wednesdays in June and July until the Museum's 1989 renovation added an auditorium. The Museum and Newark Symphony Hall alternated with New Jersey Institute of Technology as venues.



**Left:** Lena Horne with Donald Bogle.

**Right:** (front row) John G. Clemons, Gloria H. Buck, Clement A. Price, (back row) Mary Sue Price, Flora B. Baldwin, James Brown, Thomas C. Guy Jr.



**Top:** Gordon Parks, Clement A. Price; Pam Grier, Patricia Faison

**bottom:** Mary Sue Price, Gloria H. Buck, Pearl Bowser

## An All-Inclusive Vision

The Newark Black Film Festival is dedicated to highlighting films that document the life, history and culture of African America. African filmmakers and those of the African diaspora. Historical and critical perspectives allow audiences to discover links to the past while considering new points of view put forward by fresh voices. The Festival was among the first venues in the U.S. to screen the films of acclaimed Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene, often called the father of African film. The Festival also seeks to reclaim the forgotten legacy of industry pioneers and actors, including the prolific early filmmaker Oscar Micheaux, who directed his first film in 1918; Dorothy Dandridge, the first black woman to be nominated for an Academy Award (1955); and Paul Robeson, famed activist and actor.

Films are selected for their aesthetic value, political importance, and broad view of world cinema. The Festival explores cinematic links to social issues from Civil Rights to gay rights to feminism, from Postcolonial studies to the ravages of the Atlantic slave trade, and presents a range of film types, from self-reflexive comedies to large-budget historical epics. In 1981 the Festival added a popular children's Youth Cinema series.

Organized by the Newark Museum, the NBFF succeeds thanks to the long-standing dedication of its funders and selection committee, who collectively share an extensive background in the fields of film and arts, and a perceptive audience that enthusiastically attends the Festival each year.



## Paul Robeson Awards

The Festival inaugurated the biennial Paul Robeson Awards in 1985 to recognize excellence in independent filmmaking. The Robeson Awards honor the late activist, performer and athlete who courageously challenged inequity and prejudice in the U.S. after World War II, and set an enviable standard for artistic freedom and freedom of expression. Each year as many as 60 talented filmmakers submit works in categories of long and short narrative, long and short documentary, animation, and experimental. One winner and one honorable mention are named in each category (with the judges reserving the right to name no winner if a suitable submission has not been made).

Judges from New Jersey and New York represent a cross section of a diverse community and have included Newark Museum trustees, filmmakers, journalists, community partners, communications professionals, educators, and past Festival staff.

Among notable Paul Robeson Awardees are: Stanley Nelson, William Greaves, Ayoka Chenzira, Malcolm D. Lee, S. Epatha Merkerson, Rockell Metcalf, Marlon Riggs, Jerry LaMothe, Eric LaSalle, Nikki Simpson and Byron Hurt.

## The Next 40 Years

How can the NBFF make this prominent and popular annual experience even more innovative? Plans for the future include taking the Festival to other cities. Enthusiastic audiences have already welcomed the NBFF to Asbury Park, Camden, and Trenton, and many out-of-state venues have sought to duplicate the Festival's success or host it at their locations. Holding workshops and seminars for those interested in making films, and hosting a week-long conference of actors, directors, and distributors to help participants reach even larger audiences, a reprise of the Festival's 10th anniversary conference in 1984, *Coming into Focus: Blacks in Film, Past and Present*. The NBFF also will widen its global scope as it continues to provide an outlet for independent film to inspire, educate and transform the state of black awareness here and abroad.



Theodore Johnson, Richard Wesley, Jim Brown

**"Nothing can match sitting (or standing, as seats are often filled) in a Newark Black Film Festival screening and sharing every moment — almost as one — with this remarkable audience. Whether an experience of tragedy, humor, pathos or triumph, it is always transcendent."**

Mary Sue Sweeney Price

Retired Director & CEO, Newark Museum

NBFF Founding Member



This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Newark Black Film Festival (NBFF), an annual event of importance that cannot be overstated. The Festival's four decades of community service span a period of remarkable change for black filmmakers, as their work gained wider acceptance and often acclaim in mainstream American culture and on a world stage. This change did not come easily, and many new voices still need to be heard, but the prestige and opportunity afforded by having their films screened at the Newark Festival have helped talented black Americans present to all of us the important stories they have to tell.

**Steven Kern**

*Director & CEO, Newark Museum*

"The images on the big screen are powerful, and can influence how we see ourselves. Serving on the NBFF Committee gave me an opportunity to influence the development of a positive self-image and feelings of self-worth among the Newark children and families I served as a clinical social worker. It was a good marriage: my passion for the arts combined with a profession I loved."

**Gloria Hopkins Buck, LCSW**

*NBFF Founding Member and Chair*

"The intimate discussion between the audience and filmmakers is a unique aspect of the NBFF. It adds a level of awareness that is missing when you go to a movie theater and leave without knowing the impetus behind the production."

**Patricia Faison**

*NBFF Coordinator; NBFF Founding Member*

**Top:** 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary poster commissioned by artist Don Miller

**Middle:** (left) Oliver Franklin, Donald Bogle, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Richard Wesley (middle) Ayoka Chenzira (right) James Earl Jones

**Bottom:** Gloria H. Buck, Warrington Hudlin. (group front row): Richard Cammarieri, Junius Williams, Gustav Heningburg, Amir Baraka. (back row): Patricia Faison, Ralph R. Walker, Wilma J. Gray, Clement A. Price, Miriam Petty, Mary Sue Price, Gloria H. Buck





**"I am proud that the best and longest running Black film festival in America is sponsored in our city by the Newark Museum. Over its 40 years, the Newark Black Film Festival has emerged as a critically important instrument in making people aware of the history, culture and life experiences of African Americans. Both my father, Amiri Baraka, and I were honored to participate in past festivals. This is an event that no one can afford to miss."**

**Ras Baraka**  
Mayor, Newark, NJ

## 2014 Black Film Festival Committee

Gloria Hopkins Buck, LCSW \*  
Patricia Faison \*  
Jeff Friday  
Wilma J. Grey  
LeRoy Henderson  
Tynesha A. McHarris  
Lisa Payne  
Clement Alexander Price, Ph.D. \*  
Mary Sue Sweeney Price \*  
Jane W. Rappaport  
Bobby Shepard  
Ralph R. Waller  
Richard Wesley

\*Founding Committee Members

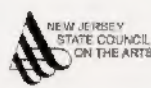
## Newark Museum

The Newark Black Film Festival is sponsored by Bank of America. Newark Museum, a not-for-profit museum of art, science and education, receives operating support from the City of Newark, the State of New Jersey, the New Jersey Council on the Arts/Department of State — a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, the New Jersey Cultural Trust, the Prudential Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Victoria Foundation, the Wallace Foundation and other corporations, foundations and individuals.

## Bank of America

Bank of America has a long-standing history of serving the financial needs of residents and businesses both nationwide and here in New Jersey. Based on the belief that arts and culture contribute to economic vitality and cultural vibrancy, each year, the Bank of America Charitable Foundation supports a wide range of organizations that deliver community-based arts outreach and education programs. The bank provides financial support to museums, theaters and other arts-related nonprofit organizations in cities and towns across the country to help them to expand programming and increase access to the arts in their communities. For example, Bank of America's Museums on Us® program offers Bank of America ATM, credit or debit cardholders the opportunity to visit more than 150 museums nationwide, free of charge, on the first full weekend of every month. Beyond arts and cultural institutions, the company supports organizations that address the basic needs of individuals and families as well as those that foster education and employment opportunities to help strengthen local economies across the state. In 2013, Bank of America provided \$4.3 million in grants and matching gifts to nonprofit organizations in New Jersey, and employees volunteered more than 64,000 hours of their time to local causes. A top-10 employer in New Jersey, Bank of America began serving the Garden State more than 70 years ago and today has more than 300 banking centers and 700 ATMs statewide.

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newarkmuseum.org

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